

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 211380
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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, UR, US

SUBJECT: US-USSR BILATERAL RELATIONS: TALK WITH VASEV
AND BESSMERTNYKH

1. SUMMARY. AT LUNCH WITH VASEV AND BESSMERTNYKH A NUMBER
OF BILATERAL ISSUES AROSE INCLUDING EXCHANGES, CANCELLATION
OF THE TASS COMPUTER, A CONGRESSIONAL RESOLUTION, AND THE
GENERAL STATE OF US-SOVIET RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. BESSMERTNYKH, WHO HAD JUST RETURNED FROM MOSCOW, GAVE
A RUNDOWN OF HIS IMPRESSIONS OF THE STATE OF US-SOVIET
RELATIONS AS SEEN FROM MFA AND OTHER MINISTRIES. HIS
CHARACTERIZATION DID NOT BREAK NEW GROUND BUT CHARACTER-
ISTICALLY HE AVOIDED SOME OF THE LANGUAGE IF NOT THE
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PAGE 02 STATE 211380

THOUGHT OF CURRENT SOVIET CLICHES. HE SPOKE IN SORROW
AND MADE FOUR BASIC POINTS:

(A) THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION HAS NOT BEHAVED IN A DEPEND-
ABLE AND PREDICTABLE FASHION. SOVIET OFFICIALS ARE
CONFUSED ABOUT WHY CERTAIN DECISIONS ARE TAKEN AND ARE
OFTEN CONFRONTED WITH SURPRISE DECISIONS. IN THE PAST,

EVEN WHEN THERE WERE SEVERE DISAGREEMENTS, THERE WAS SUFFICIENT DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES AND CLARITY AS TO WHY STEPS WERE TAKEN SO THAT THE SOVIETS AT LEAST

UNDERSTOOD THE AREAS OF DIFFICULTY AND COULD EVALUATE HOW TO RESPOND.

(B) THERE ARE TWO LEVELS OF POLICY -- THE OFFICIAL LEVEL WHICH IS WHAT WE SAY PUBLICLY AND DIPLOMATICALLY TO THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT AND AN UNDERLYING LEVEL WHICH OFTEN SEEMS TO BE DIRECTED TOWARD ACHIEVING CONTRARY OBJECTIVES. HE SPOKE PARTICULARLY OF EXPANDED ARMS BUDGETS CONFLICTING WITH ANNOUNCED ARMS CONTROL OBJECTIVES, BUT SAID THIS EXTENDED TO MANY OTHER AREAS. HE WONDERED WHETHER THIS WAS A DELIBERATE DISTORTION OR A FAILURE OF THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION TO UNDERSTAND UNDERLYING CURRENTS.

(C) ADMINISTRATION SPOKESMEN SEEM OFTEN TO STIMULATE AND PROMOTE ANTI-SOVIET ATTITUDES IN THE U.S. PUBLIC. IN PAST YEARS ADMINISTRATIONS SOUGHT TO MODERATE EMOTIONAL RHETORIC AND TONE DOWN PUBLIC REACTIONS TO EVENTS. THIS SITUATION HAS RESULTED IN AN EMOTIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS ARE DIFFICULT AND SHORT TERM POLITICAL FACTORS INTRUDE MORE READILY ON DECISION MAKING.

(D) BESSMERTNYKH SPOKE EMPHATICALLY ABOUT THE HUMAN RIGHTS
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PAGE 03 STATE 211380

POLICIES OF THE ADMINISTRATION. HE SAID THEY HAD EVOKED ANGER AND PATRIOTIC SPIRIT AMONG SOVIET CITIZENS OF ALL TYPES. INDEED, HE ENCOUNTERED FIRST REAL FLAVOR OF ANTI-AMERICANISM AT VARIOUS LEVELS OF THE SOVIET POPULACE THAT HE RECALLS. HE SAID THAT EVEN AMONG SOME WHO MIGHT BE SOMEWHAT SYMPATHETIC WITH THE AMERICAN PURPOSE, STRONG NEGATIVE REACTION HAD DEVELOPED OVER THE PERSISTENT INDICATIONS THAT THE U.S. WAS TRYING TO TRANSFORM SOVIET SOCIETY. VASEV JOINED IN AT THIS POINT WITH "VASEVIAN" EMOTION. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT IN ITS PRIVATE COUNCILS THE USG CAN SET OUT TO TRANSFORM SOVIET SOCIETY, INDEED, THAT COULD BE EXPECTED. BUT SUCH A POLICY SHOULD NOT BE ENUNCIATED AS PUBLIC POLICY. (COMMENT: THE FOREGOING IS PROVIDED WITHOUT LUERS' REBUTTAL OR COMMENT.)

3. VASEV AND BESSMERTNYKH TOOK ENCOURAGEMENT THAT SOME EXCHANGES WERE GOING FORWARD AND WORKING LEVEL CONTACTS WERE CONTINUING. VASEV SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THE US COULD NOT LOWER THE LEVEL OF ITS CONTACTS WITHOUT HAVING THE SOVIETS REPLY IN KIND. HE SAID THIS PLACED THE U.S. AT A DISADVANTAGE IN THE SENSE THAT IT IS IN THE U.S. INTEREST TO HAVE MORE SENIOR SOVIET OFFICIALS EXPOSED TO U.S.

ATTITUDES AND PROGRAMS.

4. VASEV COMPLAINED ABOUT PRESS STORIES THAT WE WERE
PRESSURING WESTERN EUROPEAN ALLIES NOT TO SELL A COMPUTER

TO TASS. HE WARNED THAT THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT MAY BE
MAKING A PROTEST ON THIS "GROSS INTERVENTION" IN SOVIET
TRADE RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS.

5. VASEV DENIED THAT HE HAD TOLD ANY CORRESPONDENTS AT ANY
TIME THAT WE HAD ORDERED CLOSED THE TASS OFFICE IN SAN
FRANCISCO. HE KNEW THAT WAS NOT THE CASE.

6. VASEV COMPLAINED THAT HE HAD READ IN THE CONGRESSIONAL
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PAGE 04 STATE 211380

RECORD AN UNUSUALLY STRONG RESOLUTION SUBMITTED IN THE
SENATE AND THE HOUSE CALLING ON THE SOVIETS TO WITHDRAW
THEIR TROOPS FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA BY THE END OF 1978. IF
THEY DO NOT WITHDRAW, THE PRESIDENT IS CALLED ON TO TAKE
MEASURES TO PRESSURE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL. HE ASKED WHAT THE
ADMINISTRATION'S POSITION WAS AND WHETHER THIS RESOLUTION
WOULD HAVE AN IMPACT ON US-SOVIET RELATIONS. VANCE

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